

The Cover Up

The Singer, Part 13

2 Samuel 11:6-27

Pick up the average newspaper and you'll more than likely bump into an article or two detailing a cover up of one sort or another.

It might be the recent corporate scandal of a major automaker that instead of recalling automobiles that had malfunctioning parts let it go and held their breath. After thirteen people died because of it, the truth came out.

You might remember the famous Enron cover up ... or you might be old enough to remember Watergate and the famous cover up that eventually brought about the resignation of the President of the United States.

I did a search online by simply typing in the words "cover up". I got sites that talked about women's cosmetics – I guess that's a form of a cover up that I'm not going to get into today.

Most of the sites had to do with scandals and conspiracies that went back for more than 100 years.

The dictionary defines a cover up as: an attempt to conceal evidence of wrongdoing, error, incompetence or other embarrassing information. In a passive cover-up, information is simply not provided; in an active cover-up, deception is used. (I thought this was an interesting addition – and I quote –) When a scandal breaks, the discovery of an attempt to cover it up is often regarded as more reprehensible than the original deed.¹

I also found an interesting site that actually revealed the rather predictable steps of a typical cover-up.

- Denial – was the first step;
- Delayed response – in other words, stall as long as you can;

- Intimidate or deceive witnesses or potential whistleblowers;
- Finally, once it's out, Damage Control.

Some things never change.

In fact, I mentally took these steps back into the life of David and his sin with Bathsheba, which we began to study last Lord's Day, and discovered that his actions will fit perfectly with this age-old pattern of a cover up.

- Denial: He'll act as if nothing happened;
- Delayed response: he'll try to stall as long as possible;
- Deceive any possible whistleblower – David will attempt to deceive the one man who could ruin him if he finds out;
- Finally, David will dedicate himself to public damage control.

The results are going to be devastating.

By the way, as we re-enter this scene, keep in mind that David is now 50 years old.

David, the Singer King has composed perhaps hundreds of songs – the rich musical literature of his nation; he's renowned as the faithful servant of God – in fact, a man after God's own heart.

At the age when David is primed to spiritually lead and produce even richer fruit for God's glory, David will not only sin, he will engage in an unimaginable cover up.

In fact, before we dive back into this scene, let me make two observations.

First, physical maturity does not exempt you from sinning.

In other words, you're never too old to sin . . . you don't outgrow the tempter . . . you merely give him more time to figure you out – to search and sift for weak spots . . . for chinks in the armor.

In other words, never let down your guard, no matter how old you are.

We're not just about to study David's sin with Bathsheba – we're about to face our own sin . . . our own ability to cover up; that Bathsheba you're sweeping under the rug – perhaps at this very moment she might be in the form of an expense account; a lust for popularity; a budding relationship that you know is off-limits; a longing for wealth or power or prestige.

Bathsheba comes in many disguises.

And you're never too old to take the bait.

About 10 years ago I shared with our assembly about that afternoon as I took Dr. John Walvoord back to the airport. At that time, he was the president of Dallas Theological Seminary and a dear friend of our church – he prayed for us every day. I was taking him back to the airport – it would be his last visit here with us.

We were talking about ministry in general when he made an off-handed comment – as if he were talking to himself – in fact, I looked over at him and he was just sort of looking out the window as he repeated, "I really want to finish well . . . I just want to finish well." He was in 80's!

He understood the danger . . . the closer he got to the finish line.

Physical maturity doesn't exempt you from sin.

Secondly, spiritual maturity doesn't exempt you from the worst of sins.

While all sin is sinful . . . some sins have longer, deeper, more far reaching consequences.

As I mentioned in our last study, *chapter 11 of Second Samuel* is the transitional chapter between David's triumphs into David's tragedies.

Now, let's pick our study back up at *2 Samuel chapter 11* and watch as David begins perhaps one of the most infamous cover ups in the record of biblical history.

For the sake of a rather quick overview of what happens next, let me give you four steps downward in David's tragic cover up.

1. We'll call Step One: Staying Calm

Let's back up into *verse 4* and get a running start. *So David sent messengers and took her (Bathsheba), and she came to him, and he lay with her (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. 5. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." 6. So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going."*

David is quick on his feet . . . he's devastated by the news, but no need to panic . . . he's staying calm . . . and he's going to act nice.

Uriah might have wondered why David wanted him to return from battle to give a report, but then again, he's been with David for more than 20 years – they go back to the early days when David had few men he could trust with his life as he ran from King Saul.

This sudden request would have been considered a compliment from the King. Uriah might very well have been thinking to himself, "David trusts me to give him the true skinny – the off-the-record account – the real story on what was really happening on the battlefield."

David ends their evening by saying to Uriah, *verse 8*, Listen, why don't you "***Go down to your house and wash your feet.***"

David wasn't suggesting that because Uriah's feet were smelling up the palace – it was a euphemism for "go home and relax and enjoy an evening at home with your wife."ⁱⁱ

Notice the latter part of *verse 8* – *And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king.*"

We're not told what that present was – most think it was food – something satisfying to further keep this battle weary, hungry soldier in the house that night – he wouldn't need to borrow food from the neighbors on this unexpected visit.

Obviously, David wants Uriah to spend the night with his wife – any pregnancy will be considered his own . . . if Bathsheba keeps quiet no one will ever know . . . and evidently Bathsheba is willing at this point to keep quiet.

Notice verse 9. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house.

David can't believe it! The calm exterior of David is beginning to waver and crack.

The middle part of verse 10. David said to Uriah, “Have you not come from a journey?” That Hebrew phrase can refer to a *military campaign*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Uriah, you’ve just come home from the brutal and difficult conditions of the front lines – **10b. “Why did you not go down to your house?”** **11. Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths (tents), and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?”**

I can’t do that!

By the way, this is a stabbing rebuke to the comfortable king who’s been lounging in bed instead of leading his troops in battle. Uriah effectively says, “How can I take a furlough and enjoy what none of my comrades can enjoy; while they and the ark of God is even now camped out in open peril against our enemies . . . I would never be that disgraceful.”^{iv}

What nobility!

Step one in this cover up was Stay Calm. Well forget that! That didn’t work.

2. Let’s call Step Two: Applying Pressure

Look at verse 12. Then David said to Uriah, “Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next.

David’s going to do two things – first, he gives Uriah the same tempting offer again, but over a longer period of time. Maybe by now Bathsheba herself has come to see him and invited him home.

We’re not told. But keep in mind, David assumes Uriah will act just like him. I’ll just keep swinging that carrot in front of his nose for another 24 hours.

But Uriah won’t bite the bait.

So David uses the only drug he has on hand to try and get Uriah to lower his inhibitions and set aside his noble conviction.

Notice verse 13. And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go to his house.

In other words, he stays in his battle gear and camps out on the king’s front porch with the other guards.

What’s this guy made of? Even when he’s drunk, he won’t capitulate his convictions . . . he won’t cooperate.^v

One author wrote that Uriah had more character when he was drunk than David had when he was sober.^{vi}

And now David is completely panicked!

He knows he’s exhausted his options.^{vii}

Any further attempt to try to keep Uriah home from the battle will come dangerously close to tipping his hand.

In fact, there are some Hebrew commentators who believe that by now Uriah would be suspicious that something is strange here – out of character.

The narrative is ambiguous – it doesn’t tell us what Uriah is thinking about this rather strange furlough and the showering of attention and the repeated offers for him to go home to his wife – but it’s very likely at this point that David in his panic assumes that Uriah will put two and two together.

In any event, David isn’t going to take any chances.^{viii}

Except one very big one.

Look at verse 14. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15. In the letter he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him that he may be struck down, and die.”

Staying calm . . . applying pressure, now gives way to step number 3 in this cover up and it is pure and simple;

3. Step Three: Conspiring to Kill

Dead men tell no tales, right? But imagine how far David is falling. He’s using Uriah to deliver his own death-warrant to Joab, his commander.

And don’t miss the fact that the only way this cover up will work is if Uriah refuses another temptation to open the letter and read it himself.

Phillip Keller writes in his commentary, “One cannot help but ponder what the outcome might have been had Uriah dared to open the letter, if but for an instant he had set aside his loyalty to the king and broken the seal to read the royal orders. The whole course of Israel’s empire might have changed in an hour. In the white heat of his flaming anger, Uriah might easily have returned to rush at the king and use his valiant sword to sever the royal head. It would not be the first time a monarch was murdered [in revenge]. David’s very life and the entire future

of his reign dangled on the slim thread of Uriah's unwavering loyalty.

And that's exactly what Uriah remains . . . loyal to his country and to his king.

He's an innocent bystander caught up in the cruelty and carnality of a cover up.

There's **another principle** here that's worth pausing to add to the record.

When someone becomes captured – willingly enslaved by some sin and ensuing cover up, they rarely if ever stop to think – here it is – that sin has a way of hurting the most, those who trust you the most.

One of David's mighty men . . . a faithful, loyal friend is carrying in his hand an order from his king that will end his life.

Now Joab realizes that David's plan is full of holes. To put Uriah in front of the troops and then retreat from him would be too obvious.

So **verse 16** reveals that what Joab does instead is assign Uriah a place where the enemy's best soldiers are fighting. And notice, Joab himself is fighting alongside him. **Verse 16 And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. 17. And the men of that city came out and fought [against] Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died.**

By the way, don't overlook the fact that Uriah isn't the only one who dies. In order to improvise and make this look as realistic as possible, Joab loses several men. Bathsheba isn't the only widow made from David's sin and cover up.

Joab's responds also implies that he knew exactly what David was trying to cover up. He knew Uriah . . . and he more than likely knew his beautiful wife, Bathsheba, the granddaughter of David's chief counselor.

Joab had probably wondered at first why David called Uriah back to Jerusalem. He'd likely heard how David was lavishing praise on Uriah and recommending he spend several nights on furlough with his wife at home.

And now here comes Uriah, back to the battlefield, carrying a letter from the king.

One author wrote, "This ruthless, rough, general tore open the letter handed to him by Uriah; without blinking an eye in disbelief, without showing a single emotion of revulsion; without a moment's hesitation, he calmly crumpled the letter up in his

bloodstained hands and order Uriah and others to follow him to the forefront of the battle lines."^{xix}

F. B. Meyer, a well-known British pastor wrote a 100 years ago another thought in his commentary on this text; when I compared it to what will happen later I thought he was probably right. He wrote, "Joab must have laughed to himself when he [read the letter]; This master of mine can sing psalms with the best but when he wants a piece of dirty work done, he comes to me. Well, I'll help him to it . . . and I shall be able to do in the future as I will."^{xx}

And he will . . . Joab will become virtually unaccountable; he will murder again, with his own hand – and without recourse from David . . . and Joab will also one day in the future defy the King's order and stab Absalom, the king's son, to death.

David has enlisted the help of an ungodly, brutal man - and he will live with even more consequences he never bargained for.

Joab will effectively blackmail him for the rest of his life.^{xi}

Joab carries out his orders without any hesitation and eventually delivers the news back to David, **verse 24, that Uriah is dead.**

Go back and tell David, "Mission accomplished."^{xii}

And now it's time for step four in this cover up to polish up what remains.

- The first step in the cover up was called: Staying calm; that didn't work
- We called step two, Applying pressure; that didn't work either
- We called David's next step – step three – Conspiring to kill; and that worked.

Now . . . we'll call this final step in every cover up;

4. Step Four: Keeping up Appearances

The first attempt to keep up appearance is to give Joab some talking points . . . he sends the messenger back with a message that reads – **verse 25b. Do not let this matter trouble you (literally, displease you) – for the sword devours now one and now another.**

In other words, this wasn't all that wrong – it's the nature of war – innocent people sometimes get caught in the crossfire . . . what's done is done.^{xiii}

Joab and David will keep their secret for nearly a year, until the cover up is exposed.

But in the meantime there would be a state funeral . . . speeches and accolades from David

about the life and career of his faithful comrade in arms – one of his mighty men – Uriah.

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the brilliant German commander who was nicknamed the Dessert Fox – consistently outwitted Churchill’s attempts to capture him and continued to create havoc on the British and their allies in World War II. He earned respect from both his comrades and his enemies.

Rommel was regarded as having been a humane officer. I found it interesting in reading that none of his corps was accused of war crimes; enemy soldiers captured during his Africa campaign were reported to have been treated humanely. In fact, orders to kill Jewish soldiers and civilians he captured were ignored.

Late in the war, Rommel was linked to a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. It was true.

Because of his hero status, and the damage it would do to Hitler and German morale, Hitler offered Rommel the opportunity to commit suicide. All he had to do was drive off with two generals, take the cyanide and his family would be granted a pension for life. He agreed. Fifteen minutes after he drove away, he was dead. A local hospital informed his wife that he had just died from battle wounds. Hitler even wired Rommel’s wife asking her to – quote – “accept my sincerest sympathy for the heavy loss you have suffered.” Hermann Goering, head of the German air force, joined in with the political appearances, writing to the widow, “The fact that your husband has died a hero’s death as the result of his wounds has deeply touched me.”^{xiv}

We might expect such oppression and sham from Nazi’s and a hundred other regimes . . . but this is Israel and this is David.^{xv}

Oh and by the way, there’s another person involved in this cover up. Notice verse 26. ***When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband.***

Three times you’re reminded in one sentence that she was married. The author doesn’t want you to forget it!

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband.

No doubt there were genuine tears of sadness and sorrow, but they were mixed with guilt and a secret that she’s unwilling to yield.

I would agree with those who believe there is the implication here that she knows what will happen

next . . . there is a pension for her in the future if she just keeps her mouth shut.

And from the silence of scripture in chapter 11 and the confrontation that we’ll see later in chapter 12, she willingly sits through that state funeral and all the speeches and all the hugs from visitors to her home and all the applause not only for her faithful husband but for her, his faithful wife . . . and all the while in secret a baby inside her womb continues to develop . . . and she never whispers a word.

We’re never allowed inside her thoughts – but what we are told, in *verse 27*, is that as soon as the traditional time of mourning was over, ***David sent for her and she became his wife.***

They waste no time . . . frankly, they can’t afford to. Everybody can count to 9 months.

But don’t miss this . . . she didn’t say no to David the first time and she doesn’t say no here either. She ought to be so angry and so crushed and so bitter and so resentful that the last thing she would ever do is walk down an aisle.

The truth is – and it isn’t pretty – Bathsheba is going to join David in keeping up appearances and keeping their secret and they’re going to do it for almost an entire year.

And listen, David’s marriage to Bathsheba would have been interpreted as kindness on his part to a faithful warrior’s widow . . . isn’t that perfect! How gracious . . . and are they the perfect couple or what?!

You can just write, “The End” over this fairytale of a story.

But the story isn’t over. We haven’t even read the last statement in this chapter. Notice – ***But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.***

So far, God hasn’t said anything; He hasn’t acted; He hasn’t moved or intervened or asserted Himself. But He is there.^{xvi}

Listen, you can never cover up with God. And for the person who knows God – a cover up is as foolish as an ostrich sticking her head in the sand and assuming all is well.

You’re living on borrowed time . . . God will have the last word.

If you’re taking mental notes, mark this:

- The silence of God does not indicate the absence of God.^{xvii}
- The patience of God does not imply the approval of God.

David is about to endure what he will write about later in one of his Psalms . . . he will begin to lose

weight; agonize in guilt; he will experience physical illness . . . fever . . . haunted memories and sleepless nights.^{xviii}

At every step downward, David had two choices – to cover up – or confess.

Here’s the lesson: Don’t choose a cover up . . . choose to confess . . . ask Him instead for His grace and goodness which leads to repentance.

No matter how embarrassing . . . how painful . . . how disturbing or how alarming . . . don’t move to step 2 or 3 or 4 . . . stop . . . stop . . . and lay bare your heart – and actions.

Confess your sin – call it what it is – and the blood of Jesus Christ will forgive you sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Say with the hymn writer who wrote it so well,
*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I’m constrained to be
Let Thy grace now, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.*
And remember . . . you’re never too old to sing that stanza:

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart, Lord
Take and Seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/18/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cover-Up>

ii J. Carl Laney, *First and Second Samuel* (Moody Press, 1982), p.

iii *Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, general editor, Frank E. Gaebelin (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 933

iv Phillip Keller, *David II* (Word Books, 1982), p. 89

v Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Integrity* (Word Publishing, 1997), p. 191

vi Adapted from Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Samuel* (Word Books, 1989), p. 302

vii Expositor’s, p. 935

viii Ibid

ix Keller, p. 92

x F.B. Meyer, *David: Shepherd, Psalmist, King* (Christian Literature Crusade, reprint, 1973), p. 160

xi Keller, p. 92

xii Swindoll, p. 192

xiii Adapted from Expositor’s, p. 937

xiv http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_Rommel

Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel* (Christian Focus, 1999), p. 144

xv Davis, p. 145

xvi Expositors, p. 938

xvii 5Davis, p. 146

xviii Adapted from Swindoll, p. 194